

**TRANSCRIPT OF MSNBC HARDBALL INTERVIEW WITH CONGRESSMAN BARNEY FRANK
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Welcome back to **HARDBALL**. That was, of course, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu today.

For more on this developing situation, let's go to NBC News chief foreign affairs correspondent Andrea Mitchell, who is in Tel Aviv for us tonight.

Andrea, what's up?

ANDREA MITCHELL, NBC CHIEF FOREIGN AFFAIRS CORRESPONDENT: Well, Benjamin Netanyahu addressing his nation today, tonight, defiant, but Israel is really reeling. They have been condemned universally around the world, except by the United States. And that's another story, because it has put the U.S. very much on the defensive with allies in the Arab and Muslim world.

But Israel is insisting that it had no choice, that it needs to defend itself against what it sees as gun-running, as weapons coming in. But they offered no proof whatsoever that there were any weapons on this flotilla of humanitarian aid shipments.

They're just saying generically, and trying to create that linkage, that impression that, in the prime minister's words, there could be missiles raining on Tel Aviv, where I'm sitting tonight, if they did not continue this blockade against Gaza.

NBC News went on its own, on our own, to Gaza today, and our people there saw a great humanitarian crisis, and families still living in tents a year-and-a-half after the Israeli invasion, no construction. And, at the same time, Netanyahu told the country tonight that there is no humanitarian crisis in Gaza, that other aid is going through.

And a lot of experts, including Martin Indyk, whom you know well, at Brookings, who is a former U.S. ambassador, says that Israel really has to deal with Hamas on this and has to come up with another way, yes, continue the blockade, if they insist on doing that -- Indyk and the United States, the White House, still disagree with that -- but they have to guarantee regular deliveries of aid into Gaza -- Chris.

MATTHEWS: What is the -- is there any alternative story to what we're looking at right now on the screen?

We're looking at these people on the ship beating the hell out of these soldiers, clearly with no intent to show restraint. And it sounds like Netanyahu on this point is right. These guys were ready to be killed on that ship.

So, what does the international community expect these soldiers to do in this situation?

MITCHELL: Well, the problem here is that you have no proof, because you have got competing video wars.

That's why the White House says there should be an independent inquiry, that it can be Israeli-led, it does not have to be U.N.-led, since Israel is not going to go along with another anti-Israel, biased report from the United Nations, but that there needs to be a credible international fact-finding group.

And Israel is resisting that. But, look, the activists have their own videos showing excessive force used. They say they were unarmed. Israel tonight released yet another video, they claim, showing non-lethal stun grenades being used by the activists against the commandos.

But our own experts looked at it and said that, from the edited tape released by the Israeli Defense Force, you can't really tell who was responsible, whether they were launched by the commandos and then bounced back. Hard to tell. So, there is no real proof as to what happened.

We do know that Israel, under great pressure, released all of the detainees. They're beginning to come back. There's a huge crowd tonight gathered in Istanbul.

MATTHEWS: Yes.

MITCHELL: And Turkey's outraged. And that's a big problem for us in the United States...

MATTHEWS: I know.

MITCHELL: ... because Turkey is right now on the Security Council, and could block -- help block -- they don't have veto, but they can muscle reaction against the U.N. sanctions against Iran.

So, friends of Israel are saying, this has backfired, this is a bad policy, they have to find a way out.

MATTHEWS: OK, thank you so much, Andrea Mitchell, who's in Tel Aviv for us tonight and for NBC News. Thank you so much, Andrea.

Let's turn now to Massachusetts Congressman **Barney Frank**, who is chairman of the House Financial Services Committee.

Congressman Frank, what do you -- this is -- how do you find objective truth in the Middle East?

REP. BARNEY FRANK (D-MA), FINANCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN: Well, it's very hard, but you really have to start with the fundamentals of the situation.

You know, first of all, we ought to be very clear that the blockade has not simply been an Israeli blockade. It's been an Israeli/Egyptian blockade. And I think that's very important, because I do think the Israelis have a legitimate concern about being unfairly blamed and double standards.

By the way, I don't remember quite so much worldwide outrage when the North Koreans sank a South Korean submarine and 46 people were killed. There are people now very upset about Israel on a much more ambiguous situation as to what could and should have happened.

We had an unprovoked attack by North Korean on a South Korean submarine, 46 people killed, and a great deal of silence and -- and -- and equivocation.

Look, you have this fundamental problem with Israel, for them. They gave up Gaza voluntarily. I was one of those who for a long time was arguing they should. What happened was, Gaza was then occupied by a group of people who think Israel shouldn't exist and who are in fact on our terrorist list for good reason.

Now, what you then have is a blockade. And the argument is, well, there were no weapons in this shipment. But a blockade that allows some things in and not others has to maintain control over the ports of entry, so you can know what is in or not.

Given that, I think it was irresponsible of the pro-Hamas people who organized this set of ships to go in there to do that, and obviously understood the potential for violence. That does not mean that everything the Israelis did in this situation was right. When military people are in a situation where they have to use force, as they had to do here, not everything will be done well. Not everything will be done correctly. I do agree it would be in Israel's interest to have an independent inquiry, appointed by Israelis. By the way, the Israeli government, the Israeli judiciary, has a very good record of holding the Israeli government to account. The Israeli Supreme Court has been much tougher on the Israeli government on security matters than the U.S. Supreme Court has been on our government, or the French or the others have been.

MATTHEWS: I know.

FRANK: So I think in interest to have -- to look at specifics. But the context is relevant, that Egypt and Israel both said, look, we have terrorists running a piece of territory here. We do not trust them to be peaceful. And we're going to monitor what goes in. I agree things could be done better. But in this particular situation, I think it would be in everybody's interest for there to be an independent inquiry, which Israel has shown itself capable of having internally, to figure out who did what, when. But the basic concept -- I do believe -- put it this way, if Hamas were in Canada, America would have a tougher blockade than Israel has.

MATTHEWS: I hate it, congressman, when I completely agree with somebody, but I do. The only question to add to that is what's the international community, the smart people in Europe that are watching it -- don't they see the movies we see? Don't they see, in this particular situation, the Israeli IDF guys getting beat up on that ship? Don't they see it?

FRANK: Let me add one other thing, Chris -- and it's true, this is causing -- the blockade hurts people in Gaza. And by the way, again, it was an Egyptian/Israeli blockade. So let's be clear. The Egyptians, for their own reasons of self-preservation, were doing this. Blockades hurt people. The blockade of North Korea hurts North Koreans. I remember when we were fighting Apartheid in South Africa, being told by Ronald Reagan, who vetoed the sanctions bill -- you remember this, Chris. And we overrode Ronald Reagan's veto to impose tough sanctions, economic, on South Africa. And the Reaganites said to us you're hurting the poor black people of South Africa. And Nelson Mandela later stood in the Capital of the United States and said, thank you for doing that, because you need to put pressure on them. So again, if the blockade can be done better, I'm not an expert on that. Yes, humanitarian aid should get in. Food should get in. The Israelis say it has been. If there's a dispute there, let's work to make -- to

increase it. And an inquiry should look and say what we've done with the American military. You put military people in a position where they have to use force and it's not going to be done perfectly. But on the fundamentals, on the right to a blockade, again, we have to go back to the fact this doesn't happen in the West Bank. It happens in Gaza because a terrorist group that's opposed to Israel's very existence took physical control from the elected government at the time, the president, who won the parliament and have used it as a base of attacks.

MATTHEWS: You know what? I think when you let the Europeans judge Israel, you're not letting them be judged by a panel of their peers. It does seem a totally prejudicial situation. Go ahead, one last thing.

FRANK: About Turkey and Iran, unfortunately -- and getting sanctions against Iran is very important. I'm willing to show a little slack to the Chinese for that. But the Turks and the Brazilian just undermine our efforts to deal with Iran a couple weeks ago. So turkey can't blame this, and the Turks should not have been allowing themselves to be used in this situation by Hamas. But the Turks can't blame this for the fact that they've already been out of sync with us on Iranian sanctions.

MATTHEWS: Well, they've got an Islamic government. Thank you so much, Islamist government, perhaps. Thanks you very much, Congressman **Barney Frank** of Massachusetts.